

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BELIZE 0522

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR BH GT
SUBJECT: INDICATIONS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UK-GUATEMALA
DISPUTE

1. SUMMARY: IN THE MONTH SINCE THE WASHINGTON TALKS ON BELIZE,
SOME SIGNS HAVE APPEARED HERE WHICH MAY HAVE A BEARING ON
FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BELIZE DISPUTE. PREMIER PRICE,
GOVERNOR MACENTEE, AND POSSIBLY HMG SEEM TO BE THINKING LESS
ABOUT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT AND MORE IN TERMS OF A UN-MANDATED
INDEPENDENCE FOR BELIZE WHICH MIGHT ENTAIL THE POST-INDEPENDENCE
PRESENCE OF BRITISH FORCES, GARNISHED, PERHAPS, BY A HANDFUL
OF TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH. WHAT HOPES THERE
MAY ONCE HAVE BEEN FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT INVOLVING
A TERRITORIAL CESSION TO GUATEMALA HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY
UNDERMINED BY LOCAL OPPOSITION POLITICIANS WHO ARE MORE
INTERESTED IN GAINING POWER FOR THEMSELVES THAN INDEPENDENCE
FOR BELIZE. OIL EXPLORATION DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SOUTH MAY
FURTHER COMPLICATE THE PROBLEM. QUESTIONS FOR US POLICY
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WOULD SEEM TO INCLUDE 1) EXTENT TO WHICH WE SHOULD REMAIN
ASSOCIATED WITH SETTLEMENT OPTIONS INVOLVING CESSION OF BELIZEAN
TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA AND 2) WHETHER WE SHOULD OPPOSE,
TACITLY SUPPORT OR ABJURE ANY ROLE WHATSOEVER IN THE EVENT
OF A UN-MANDATED INDEPENDENCE FOR BELIZE. END OF SUMMARY.

2. GOVERNOR MACENTEE, IN COURSE OF PRIVATE CONVERSATION AT A
SOCIAL FUNCTION AUGUST 3, TOLD ME HE EXPECTED NEXT MAJOR
DEVELOPMENT AND POTENTIAL CRISIS IN BELIZE DISPUTE WOULD
EMERGE FROM UNGA ACTION ON MATTER IN FALL. HE THOUGHT THIS

WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A RESOLUTION SPONSORED BY CERTAIN COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENTS DEMANDING HMG INITIATE PROCESS OF GRANTING BELIZE INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY AND WITH APPROPRIATE MEASURES TO PROTECT THE NEW STATE AGAINST THE GUATEMALAN THREAT, MEASURES ENVISAGED BY H.E. TO INCLUDE CONTINUED POST-INDEPENDENCE PRESENCE OF BRITISH TROOPS, JOINED BY WHATEVER CONTRIBUTION OF MILITARY FORCES - PROBABLY OF ONLY TOKEN SIZE, IN MOST CASES - BELIZE'S FRIENDS MIGHT BE WILLING TO PROVIDE IN ORDER TO IMPART A MULTILATERAL CAST TO BELIZEAN DEFENSE EFFORT. THIS MIGHT MAKE SUCH MEASURES MORE PALATABLE TO BRITISH PARLIAMENT AND PUBLIC AND MIGHT BE MORE EFFECTIVE IN DETERRING A GUATEMALAN ATTACK. HE FELT CERTAIN THAT IF SUCH A RESOLUTION WERE PROPOSED HMG WOULD SUPPORT IT. AS FOR THE GENUINENESS OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND OTHER THIRD WORLD SUPPORT FOR BELIZEAN INDEPENDENCE, H.E. SAID HE WAS CONVINCED MOMENTUM OF THE BELIZEAN CAUSE WAS INCREASING AND IN NEXT UNGA SESSION MIGHT WELL PROVE INEXORABLE. FURTHERMORE, WHEN TIME CAME FOR THE UK DELEGATION TO THE UN TO REVEAL PUBLICLY THE FULL EXTENT OF WHAT HMG HAD OFFERED THE GUATEMALANS, IT WOULD BE CLEAR TO ALL WHAT A GENUINE AND GENEROUS EFFORT THE BRITISH HAD MADE IN TRYING TO SETTLE THE DISPUTE. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION OF MINE ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WITH GUATEMALA, H.E. WAS PESSIMISTIC ALMOST TO THE CONFIDENTIAL

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POINT OF DISSMISSING IT. HE SAID IDEA OF CESSION OF TERRITORY SOUTH OF THE MOHO RIVER HAD BEEN BROACHED VERY HYPOTHETICALLY AND OFF-HANDEDLY AT THE RECENT TALKS AND THAT THE GUATEMALANS HAD DECISIVELY REJECTED IT; CONSEQUENTLY, IT WAS "NO LONGER EVEN ON THE TABLE."

3. THAT PREMIER PRICE IS THINKING ALONG LINES SIMILAR TO ABOVE IS ILLUSTRATED BY FOLLOWING LETTER APPEARING IN LATEST ISSUE OF THE ECONOMIST.

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

"SIR--YOUR ARTICLE "THE BELIZE CONUNDRUM" (JULY 16TH) POSES WELL THE TEXTBOOK PROBLEM. WHAT IS TO BE DONE WHEN A METROPOLITAN COUNTRY WANTS TO DECOLONISE AND A MINI-IMPERIALIST THREATENS TO COLONISE BY INVASION? THE BELIZE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT ASK FOR A PERMANENT DEFENCE GUARANTEE. IT ASKS FOR A MULTINATIONAL COMMONWEALTH PLUS WESTERN HEMISPHERIC GUARANTEE FOR A LIMITED TIME DURING WHICH BELIZE WOULD ATTAIN A SECURE INDEPENDENCE WITH TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION AS A FULL MEMBER OF THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE THIRD WORLD. IS THIS TOO DIFFICULT TO PROVIDE WHEN THERE IS A WILL TO DECOLONISE?
GEORGE PRICE, PREMIER"

END UNCLASSIFIED

4. OUTLOOK FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF THE DISPUTE IS BEING FURTHER DIMMED BY QUICKENING TEMPO OF LOCAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES HERE. THESE RELATE TO A) CAMPAIGN FOR BELIZE CITY ELECTIONS WHICH, IF OPPOSITION PARTY (UDP) WINS - AS MOST LOCAL OBSERVERS EXPECT - WILL SIGNIFICANTLY ADVANCE B) THE MUCH HIGHER PRIORITY OPPOSITION GOAL OF FORCING PRICE GOVERNMENT TO AGREE TO A NATIONAL REFERENDUM BEFORE PROCEEDING WITH INDEPENDENCE. UDP STRATEGY IS TO CONVINCE VOTERS PRICE WOULD SACRIFICE IMPORTANT NATIONAL INTERESTS IN ORDER TO GAIN INDEPENDENCE
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AND SPECIFICALLY THAT HE HAS ALREADY RENEGED ON PLEDGE THAT HE WOULD NOT CEDE "ONE SQUARE CENTIMETER" OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA. THIS THEME HAS BEEN REITERATED FREQUENTLY BY UDP SPEAKERS AT RECENT POLITICAL RALLIES, AND ALSO IN OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS, ESPECIALLY SINCE JULY TALKS. LATEST EXAMPLE IS LEAD ARTICLE IN UDP TABLOID BEACON HEADLINED "UK GOVERNMENT CONFIRM THAT PUP GOVERNMENT AGREED TO GIVE PART OF BELIZE TO

GUATEMALA". STORY QUOTED REPLY BY LORD CARONWY-ROBERTS OF FCO TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN HOUSE OF LORDS BY LORD BOSTON OF FAVERSHAM AS TO WHETHER HMG WAS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF ADDITIONAL ACCESS BY GUATEMALANS THROUGH BELIZE. LORD CARONWY-ROBERTS IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID, "WE HAVE OFFERED COOPERATION AND CONSULTATIONS BETWEEN GUATEMALA AND AN INDEPENDENT BELIZE IN THE FIELDS OF DEFENSE, SECURITY, FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND A NEW SEAWARD BOUNDARY WHICH WOULD PROVIDE GUATEMALA WITH GUARANTEED AND PERMANENT ACCESS TO THE CARIBBEAN" AND THAT THESE PROPOSALS HAD BEEN MADE WITH THE CONCURRENCE OF THE BELIZE GOVERNMENT. FROM THIS, BEACON ARTICLE INFERRED AS FOLLOWS, "SO WHEN GEORGE PRICE AND HIS DISHONEST MINISTERS SAID THAT NOT ONE SQUARE INCH OF BELIZEAN SOIL IS FOR NEGOTIATION, IT WAS A DELIBERATE ATTEMPT TO LULL THE PEOPLE INTO A STATE OF FALSE SECURITY. NOW THAT THE BIG LIE HAS BEEN EXPOSED, PRICE ADMINISTRATION WILL EITHER HAVE TO COME CLEAN TO THE PUBLIC OR FACE THE CONSEQUENCES". SAME ISSUE OF BEACON CARRIED TEXT OF LETTER FROM OPPOSITION LEADER DEAN LINDO TO GOVERNOR ASSERTING THIS WAS THE FIRST THE HAD KNOWN OF GOB CONCURRENCE IN THESE PROPOSALS (ABSOLUTELY NOT TRUE, THE GOVERNOR TOLD ME), THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN CONSULTED IN THEIR DRAFTING AND THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN BRIEFED ON THE PROGRESS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS PRIOR TO HIS PARTICIPATION IN RECENT WASHINGTON TALKS.

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5. THAT PRICE IS IN TROUBLE POLITICALLY IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED HERE. ATTENDANCE AT RECENT UDP RALLIES HAS BEEN ROBUST AND CROWD RESPONSE TO CHARGES THAT PRICE IS SOFT ON GUATEMALA SEEMS TO INDICATE UDP STRATEGY IS WORKING, AND PUP IS BEGINNING

TO RESPOND WITH PUBLIC MEETINGS OF ITS OWN IN WHICH THE RALLYING CRY OF EARLY INDEPENDENCE AND PRESERVATION OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY ARE THE MAIN THEMES.

6. ANOTHER DEVELOPMENT WHICH MAY HAVE A BEARING ON GOB'S ATTITUDE TOWARD POSSIBLE CESSION OF TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA IS COMMENCEMENT OF ONSHORE EXPLORATORY DRILLING PROGRAM IN TOLEDO, FIRST WELL HAVING BEEN STARTED IN JULY NEAR VILLAGE OF CRIQUE SARCO, SOUTH OF THE MOHO RIVER.

7. COMMENT: IN CIRCUMSTANCES CITED ABOVE, OUTLOOK FOR PROGRESS TOWARD ANY NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF BELIZE DISPUTE INVOLVING CESSION OF BELIZEAN TERRITORY LOOKS POOR AND SEEMS LIKELY TO LOOK WORSE AS AUTUMN NEARS. PREMIER PRICE AND (IF GOVERNOR'S ASSESSMENT IS ACCURATE) HMG APPEAR TO BE THINKING MORE AND MORE IN TERMS OF A UN-MANDATED INDEPENDENCE WITHOUT GUATEMALAN ACQUIESCENCE. WHILE PRICE PROBABLY DOES NOT WELCOME THE PROSPECT OF A LEGACY OF PERPETUAL GUATEMALAN REVANCHISM, HE WOULD PROBABLY MUCH RATHER TAKE A CHANCE ON INDEPENDENCE WITH A MULTILATERAL DEFENSE FORCE, EVEN WITH THE CONTINUED OPPOSITION CARPING THIS MIGHT ENTAIL, THAN THE POLITICAL SUICIDE HE WOULD COMMIT AT THIS POINT BY TRYING TO SELL A TERRITORIAL CESSION TO THE BELIZEAN PEOPLE. IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY ARE 1) QUESTION OF EXTENT TO WHICH WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO ASSOCIATE OURSELVES WITH ALTERNATIVES INVOLVING TERRITORIAL CESSION SINCE PROGNOSIS FOR THESE IS SO CLEARLY NEGATIVE. ALSO, IF ABOVE CITED INDICATIONS ARE CONFIRMED THAT A UN-MANDATED INDEPENDENCE MAY BE IN THE WORKS, PERHAPS WE SHOULD TAKE A LOOK AT WHETHER THIS WOULD BE A TOTALLY NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW. IT WOULD NOT SEEM THAT WE COULD OPENLY SUPPORT IT BECAUSE OF THE DAMAGE IT WOULD DO TO US IN GUATEMALA, AND PERHAPS ELSEWHERE AND EVEN TACIT SUPPORT MIGHT BE DANGEROUS. CONFIDENTIAL

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ON THE OTHER HAND, COULD WE AFFORD TO OPPOSE IT? PERHAPS THE BEST POLICY WOULD BE TO STAY OUT OF IT ENTIRELY, BUT THIS WOULD MEAN WE WOULD HAVE TO BE PREPARED TO LIVE WITH THE RESULT,

AN AN ARRANGEMENT WHICH WOULD NOT NECESSARILY ENHANCE THE STABILITY OF THE AREA.
GAWF

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